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(54) **SELF-CONTAINED, SELF-CLEANING
AQUEOUS LIQUID STERILIZER**

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C02F 1/02 (2006.01)

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CPC **A61L 2/04** (2013.01); **C02F 2201/002** (2013.01); **A61L 2/28** (2013.01); **C02F 1/006** (2013.01); **C02F 1/02** (2013.01); **C02F 2209/02**

(2013.01); **C02F 2209/03** (2013.01); **C02F 2209/40** (2013.01); **C02F 2303/04** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

None

See application file for complete search history.

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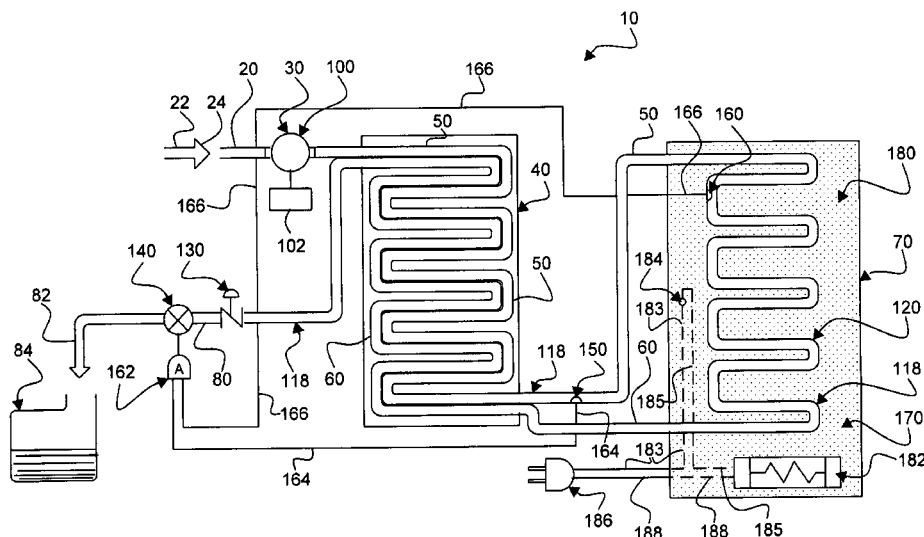
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ABSTRACT

A flow through aqueous liquid sterilization apparatus which employs substantially fixed temperatures and pressures and variable flow rates through the apparatus for controllably processing aqueous liquids to achieve predetermined values of SALs. This apparatus is also self-contained and self-cleaning using steam generated by reducing pressure during normal operation, as well as inhibiting growth of contaminating species during intermittent system shut-down periods.

11 Claims, 3 Drawing Sheets



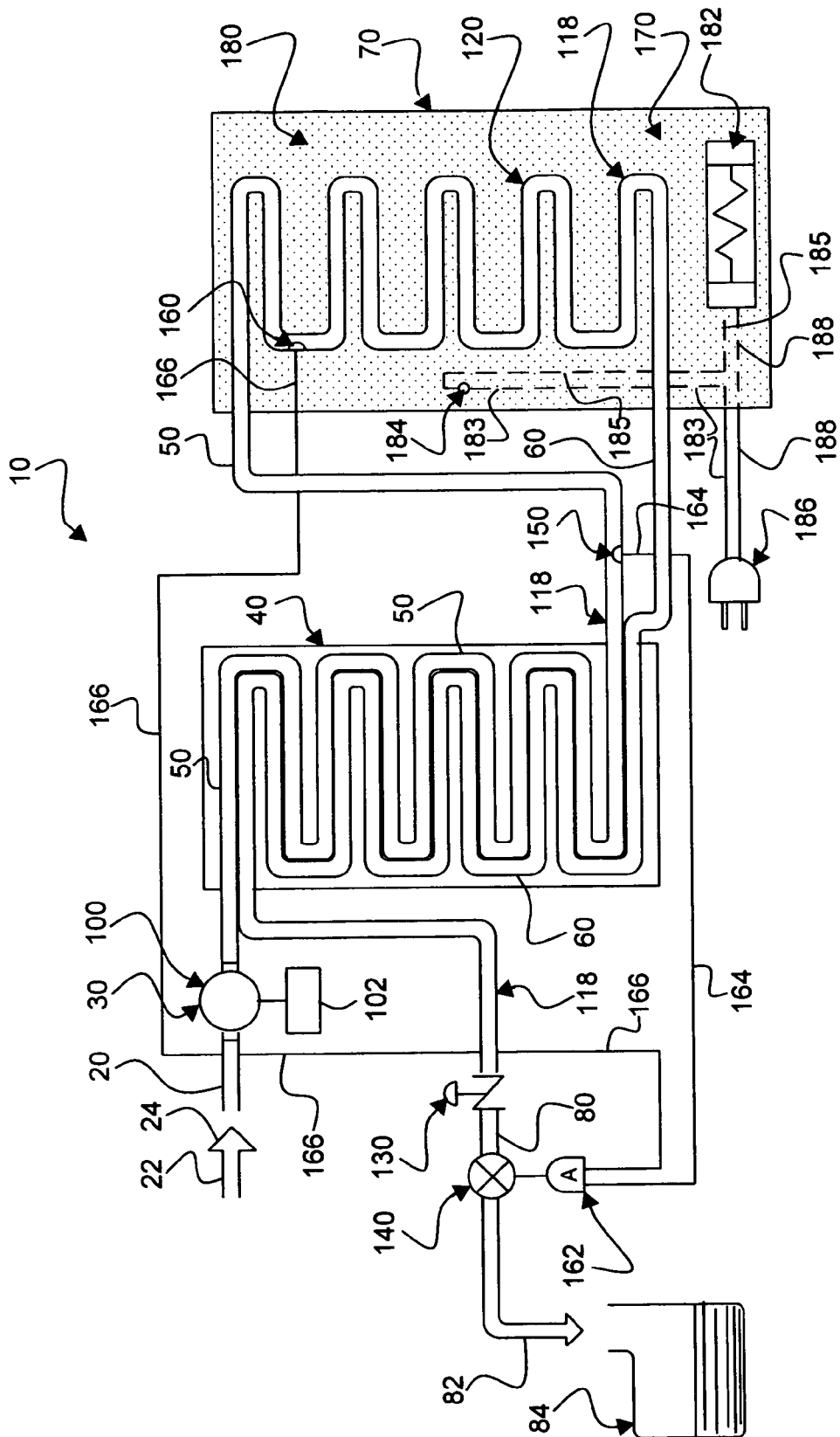


Figure 1

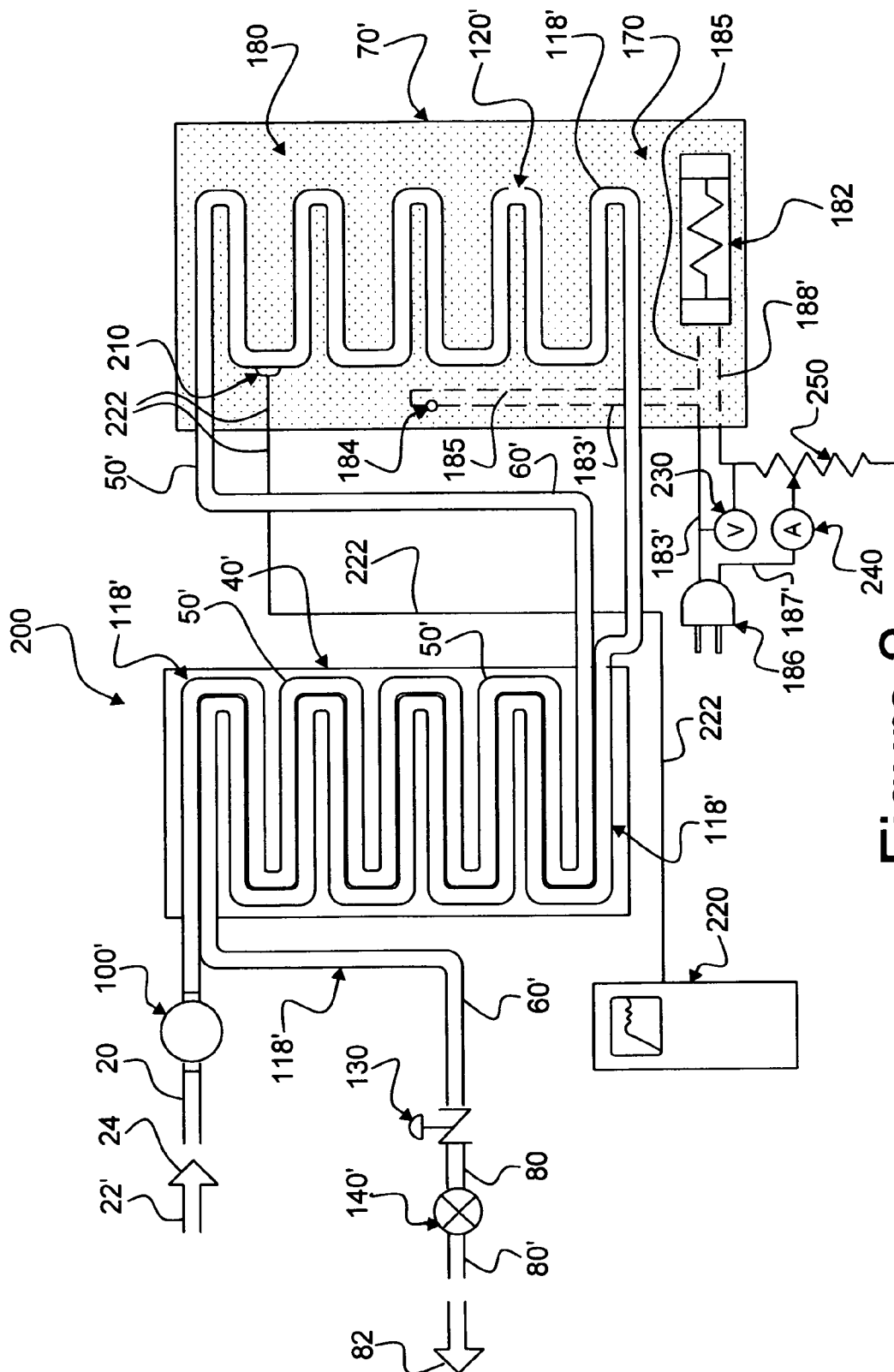


Figure 2

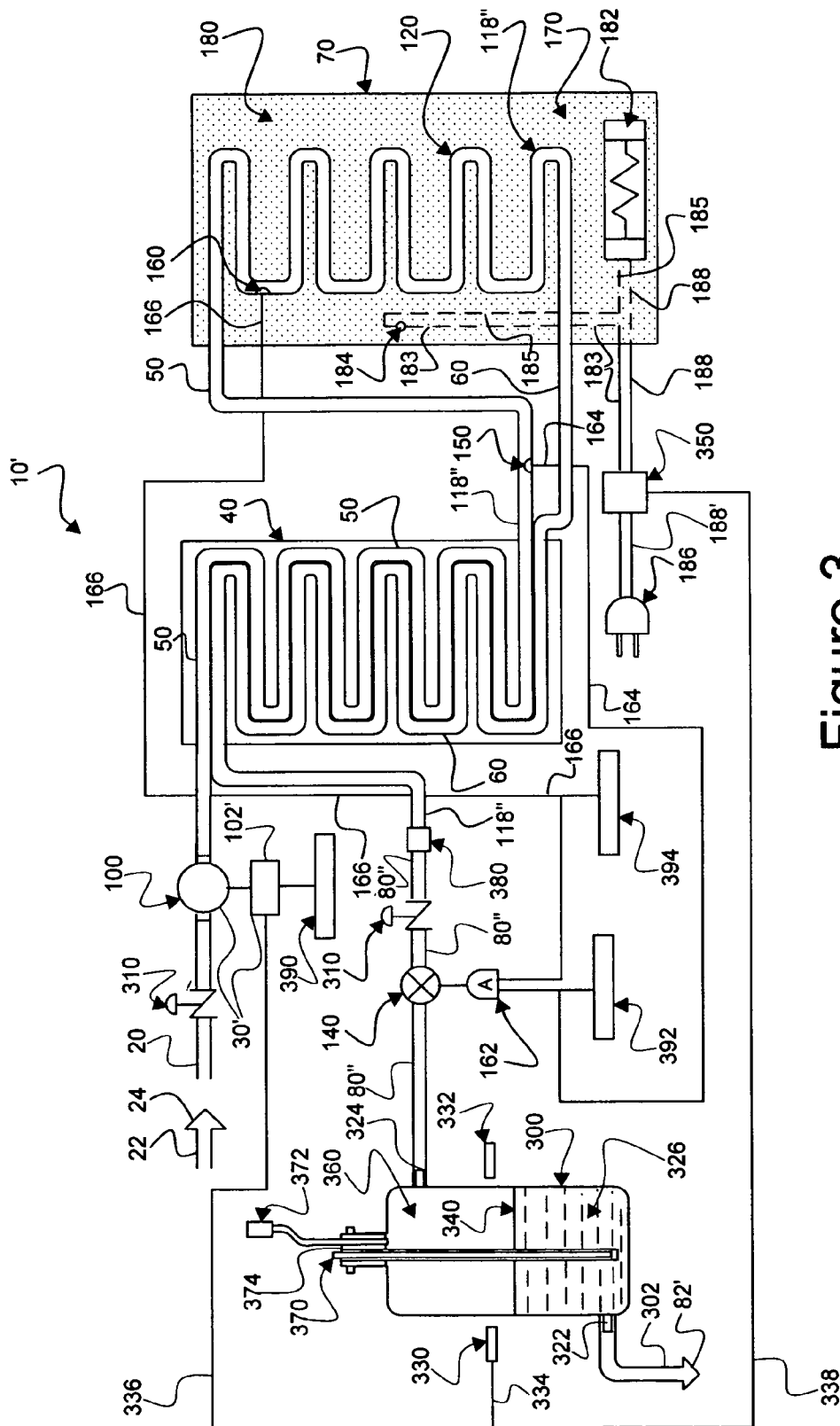


Figure 3

SELF-CONTAINED, SELF-CLEANING AQUEOUS LIQUID STERILIZER

CONTINUATION

This U.S. patent application is a Continuation-in-part of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/136,446, filed Aug. 1, 2011 which is a Continuation-in-Part of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/925,912, filed Nov. 2, 2010 now abandoned, which is a Division of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/799,932 filed May 5, 2010, and allowed as U.S. Pat. No. 7,862,784 B2 Jan. 4, 2011, which is a Continuation of a U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/008,038, filed Jan. 8, 2008, (now abandoned) which is a Continuation-in-Part for U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/210,217, filed Aug. 22, 2005, (now abandoned), all filed by John G. Bowen. In particular, U.S. patent Ser. No. 12/008,038 is made part hereof, by reference.

FIELD OF INVENTION

This invention relates to apparatus and methods by which aqueous (water based) liquids are decontaminated, collected and stored for culinary purposes. This invention is further related to methods which decontaminate such aqueous liquids without use of chemical or light energy processes.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

There is an ever increasing need for new, more effective, efficient and lower cost methods for decontaminating water and other water based (aqueous) liquids. As an example, Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports in a Mar. 6, 2003, report on BACTERIAL WATERBORNE DISEASES that each year there are 3.5 billion episodes of illness and a resulting three million estimated deaths caused by contaminated water and despite global efforts improvements have barely kept pace with population increases. From an Emerging Infectious Diseases article, dated 10 Oct. 2005, it was reported that seventeen percent of all deaths of children under five years of age in the developing world was caused by contaminated water. With these statistics, it is astounding that no water purification method is currently available and in-use to prevent such water borne illnesses. Likely such is not available due to the expense of currently available water purification systems. The simplicity and associated potential low cost of manufacture and operation of devices made according to the instant invention promise to make substantial inroads toward a solution to these problems. As an example, a gallon of sterile water from this instant invention can be produced at an expense of approximately two hundred watt hours of energy.

A profound example of changes in methods of water purification is a new water treatment plant located in Salt Lake City, Utah. Rather than chlorine, this plant employs ozone and ultraviolet light, as ultraviolet light is more effective than chlorine in terms of decontaminating water containing cryptosporidium and other chlorine resistant microbes. However, use of light is known to sometimes be ineffective and at other times be unpredictable when used in water that has variable light transmission quality.

While decontamination and purification are terms generally considered in an ultimate context of complete elimination of any and all undesirable contaminants, it is generally known, as disclosed on page 68 of *Principles and Methods of Sterilization*, 2nd Edition, published by Charles C. Thomas, Springfield, Ill., in 1983, that complete sterilization should never be considered as completely attained. Rather, biologi-

cal contaminants should be considered to be eliminated logarithmically, such as being measured by time constants dependent upon intensity and method of treatment. As an example, if a process, using heat at a specific temperature, kills a particular organism at a rate of 90% per minute, 10% of the organism survives at the end of the first minute of treatment. One percent survives the second minute of treatment and to achieve a kill of 99.9999% requires a treatment period of six minutes. Thus, at a constant temperature (constant application of heat) kill rate becomes a function of time.

To codify a standard for sterilization, the Association for the Advancement of Medical Instrumentation (AAMI), 110 N. Glebe Road, Suite 220, Arlington, Va. 22201-4795 has issued a proposed standard for selecting appropriate Sterility Assurance Levels (SALs) (See *Proposed Standard on Selecting Appropriate Sterility Assurance Levels* published as an Internet bulletin on Feb. 10, 2000). While, SALs are generally used to determine levels of sterilization for medical products, a similar standard may be considered for water and other aqueous liquid purification, as well. AAMI reports, as examples, that items which come into contact with skin may need only an SAL of 10^{-3} while implants or sterile liquid pathway products should be sterilized to an SAL of 10^{-6} .

Similar considerations might be applied to water purification. Drinking water from one source might be sufficiently pure at an SAL of 10^{-3} while another source might require an SAL of 10^{-4} or better. It may also be desired to have a single water purification or sterilization system which could be used for various purposes (e.g. for drinking water or for a medical application). Also, such aqueous liquids as milk might require different sterilization for different packaging and storage requirements. This invention is meant to fulfill a variety of applications related to meeting requirements for a variety of sterilization levels.

A number of U.S. patents cite methods and apparatus for achieving various levels of sterilization of aqueous liquids. An example of such a patent is provided by U.S. Pat. No. 6,136,362, issued Oct. 24, 2000, to Roger J. Ashton (Ashton), titled HIGH TEMPERATURE/SHORT TIME PASTEURIZATION SYSTEM AND METHOD OF CLEANING. Ashton particularly teaches a way of cleaning a system used for pasteurization of milk. While pasteurization has long been used to improve safety and lengthen term for storage of milk, pasteurized milk has also been recognized as still containing microbes and, therefore, is not completely sterilized. Even so, continuous flow pasteurization is not taught in Ashton, but rather Ashton teaches a system for cleaning a pasteurization circuit without connecting and disconnecting apparatus. Also, Ashton does not teach regulating pressure at a temperature required for sterilization.

Another U.S. Pat. No. 5,403,564 issued Apr. 4, 1995 to Helmut Ketschnig et al. (Ketschnig), titled APPARATUS FOR HEATING AND THERMAL DECONTAMINATING A PUMPABLE OR POURABLE MATERIAL, discloses apparatus for heating and thermal decontamination using a microwave unit. As such, Ketschnig makes no attempt to insure that non-sterile material will not contaminate a conduit leading from the microwave unit to a discharge tube. In other words, Ketschnig sterilizes by means of radiation and assures any achieved sterilization only within the zone of radiation.

A U.S. Pat. No. 6,673,311 B1 issued Jan. 6, 2004, to Kazuyoshi Sotoyama, et al., (Sotoyama) titled METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR CONTINUOUS HEAT STERILIZATION OF LIQUID, discloses sterilization by heating and rapid release of pressure. As such, Sotoyama employs a rapid high pressure release (which may be a pressure drop in the range of 2 to 100 MPa). Such an initial pressure is much

higher than pressure employed in the instant invention which is in the range of 0.2 to 0.5 MPa, and no rapid pressure release is employed in flow through sterilizing methods of the instant invention.

U.S. Pat. No. 6,579,494 B1 issued Jun. 17, 2003, to Jacques Chevallet, et al. (Chavallet) and titled PROCESS AND DEVICE FOR STERILIZING AND DISPENSING A LIQUID FOR MEDICAL USE discloses method and apparatus for sterilizing liquids for medical use. As such, Chavallet discloses and claims a validating structure which permits and requires a “means for validating a sterilization treatment” resulting from an implemented adjustable heating apparatus. Chevallet makes an interesting point relative to checking a 10^{-6} level of viable microorganisms in a continuous flow apparatus, saying that such a check according to Poisson probability is unachievable. For this reason, processes according to the present invention necessarily rely upon fixing at least two parameters (temperature and pressure) and post delivery validation testing.

DEFINITIONS

The following Definitions Table provides a list of items and associated definitions as defined for use in the patent application:

- pressurized source, n, a source of water to be sterilized which delivers water at sufficient pressure to maintain the water in a liquid state when heated to a predetermined sterilizing temperature.
- single, unbifurcated pathway, n, a pathway which communicates with only two external ports (an influent port and an effluent port) in normal operation, the influent port being disposed to receive water from a pressurized source and the effluent port disposed to dispense only water of a selected SAL. Further, the pathway is defined to comprise sidewalls capable of withstanding increased internal pressure of water at the sterilizing temperature while being held in a liquid state.
- heating chamber, n, a chamber which encloses a portion of the single, unbifurcated pathway in which water flows while being heated, the portion comprising structure for thermal communication between the water and a heat sink material by which heat is thermally communicated to the water.
- heat source, n, associated with the heating chamber, a thermal source for heating the water to a predetermined stabilizing temperature.
- flow controller, n, a water flow rate control device which controls water flow rate through the single, unbifurcated pathway to assure time for water flowing within the pathway is held at the sterilizing temperature for a predetermined period of time.
- binary temperature sensor, n, a temperature sensor which emits a signal only when a predetermined temperature is met or exceeded.
- binary pressure sensor, n, a pressure sensor which emits a signal when a predetermined pressure is met or exceeded.
- pathway controller, n, at least one valving mechanism which opens or closes the single, unbifurcated pathway to flow there through.

DEFINITIONS TABLE

Brief Summary and Objects of the Invention

In brief summary, this novel invention alleviates all of the known problems related to safely and efficaciously decon-

taminating aqueous liquids for a variety of uses. The invention is a “flow-through” device which receives influent contaminated liquid or impure liquid of questionable pollution and provides a sterilized effluent product decontaminated to meet a variety of applications. Further, sterilization levels (i.e. SALs) may be facily, accurately, predictively and variably controlled, depending upon known or assumed characteristics of an influent liquid to be sterilized and projected use of that liquid. Sterilization to various levels is realized through changing but a single variable (flow rate through the apparatus) and while other parameters, such as heating temperature, pressure, etc., are kept substantially constant.

The invention comprises a liquid source and a flow regulation controller which provide a variable control setting for flow of influent liquid. Further, an optional input pump provides sufficient pressure to the source to open a pressure sensitive valve (used if upstream source pressure is inadequate to open the pressure sensitive valve). From the source, liquid is distributed via a closed reservoir (e.g. coils) within a heating chamber.

The heating chamber has a non-linear heat-sink material which permits controlled heating at a substantially constant temperature. It is important that temperature remain constant to assure a predictable organism kill rate within liquid flowing through the closed reservoir. (For example, for a predictable organism kill rate, temperature should be substantially constant, as in an embodiment of the instant invention, controlled within plus or minus three degrees Centigrade.) The closed reservoir should have a capacity which holds a liquid volume at least equal to a given maximum desired flow rate for a time necessary for sterilizing the liquid to a predetermined SAL value.

Strategically disposed in thermal communication with the closed reservoir is a temperature sensor which is used to assure that liquid flowing through the heating chamber is at least at a temperature which is consistent with desired sterilization. Of course, the controlled flow rate determines effective dwell time in the heating chamber and, therefore, an ultimate SAL value of effluent liquid streaming from the closed reservoir.

Heating of the heating chamber may be performed by such heat sources as electric elements, gas burners, solar and/or geothermal energy. To assure that heating is sufficiently accurately controlled, it is preferred that the heating chamber provide an accurately controlled temperature “bath” through which the liquid flows. Presently, that bath is filled with a paraffin having a predetermined melting temperature, therefore employed to maintain the precise temperature.

Actual sterilization efficiency is dependent upon maintaining a liquid temperature above 100° Centigrade (e.g. 150° Centigrade) at a pressure (e.g. 55 psi) which assures achieving a desired SAL as liquid flows for a predetermined time through the closed reservoir. Thus, flow rate is the primary and singular variable used to achieve a target SAL.

Other than flow control at the source or influent site of the closed reservoir, two other flow control elements are employed. Downstream, near the effluent site of the closed reservoir, a pressure relief valve (earlier referenced) is disposed in the effluent flow path to guarantee that a predetermined minimum upstream pressure is maintained within the closed reservoir. Another, second, valve is also serially disposed in the flow path, preferably distal from the heating chamber and the pressure release valve.

The second valve may selectively be gated by an “AND” combination of water temperature and pressure sensors, although a temperature regulated valve in series with the first valve also performs the “AND” function. The temperature

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and pressure sensors are each disposed at individual predetermined strategic sites within the water flow path. In one embodiment, temperature is sensed by a bi-metallic sensor switch disposed within the closed reservoir, sufficiently close to the influent site of the closed reservoir to assure that a predetermined minimum sterilization temperature has been achieved, thereby assuring maintenance of the minimum sterilization temperature within the remainder of the closed reservoir. In this embodiment, a pressure sensor, having a pressure-sensitive switch, is disposed upstream from the closed reservoir. The pressure sensor is selectively closed when a predetermined sterilization upstream pressure is detected. The contacts of the temperature sensor and pressure sensor are connected in series such that when contacts of each switch close the second valve is opened (i.e. before the second valve opens, the temperature sensor must sense at least a predetermined temperature and the pressure sensor, likewise, must have detected a predetermined pressure.) Importantly, simultaneously meeting these combined conditions assures achieving target SAL in the effluent, thereby protecting sterility of the downstream system.

Also, each switch of each sensor is opened and closed at different values (of temperature and pressure), thereby creating a hysteresis in each switching parameter and, as a result, assuring stable operation. For example, the temperature sensor may operate to close the temperature switch at a temperature of substantially 150° C. and operate to open the switch at 140° C. In tandem with the temperature sensor, the pressure sensor may operate to close the pressure switch at 50 psi and open the pressure switch at 40 psi. In the case of the "AND" gate, only when both switches are closed is the second valve opened.

To preserve as much energy as possible, it is preferred to steer effluent through a heat exchanger which transfers heat from the effluent to the influent such that temperature, and therefore thermal energy, of liquid flowing from the closed reservoir is substantially reduced. In this manner, by controlling dwell time in the closed reservoir liquid flow within predetermined limits, liquid of a desired SAL is provided as a cooled continuous flow effluent product. It is also important that all liquid remains in a liquid state through the entire flow path.

The above apparatus and method as disclosed supra and in detail in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/136,446, filed Aug. 1, 2011 (Bowen 446) from which this Patent Application continues-in-part, operates effectively in a continuing dynamic mode. However, real world operation requires consideration of other factors such as:

1. Biofilm build-up at a liquid input site
2. Growth and proliferation of contaminating media which are only partially eradicated (not reduced to a desired SAL) upon system shut down due to a filled down stream reservoir or upon power failure
3. Oxidative contamination resulting from released gaseous anions which may occur during a shut down period
4. Retrograde contamination through the down stream reservoir

While none of these factors effect the efficacy and safety of a continuously operating apparatus as disclosed in Bowen 446, general use operation of an apparatus made according to this invention should provide solutions for problems associated with such factors.

For this purpose, a defeatable (i.e. manually openable) in-line valve is dispensed upstream from the pressure source (e.g. a pump). Defeating (opening) the in-line valve reduces system pressure (which automatically closes off down stream flow as disclosed in Bowen 446). Reduction in system pres-

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sure when aqueous liquid flowing through the system for sterilization to a target SAL results in a state change in the heated liquid. The state change produces a gas (e.g. steam) at a high pressure which flows back through the liquid source channel to effectively clear and clean biofilm which is building at the entry site of the mechanism.

Termination of power to the apparatus likely results in only partial sterilizing of some contaminated contents of the apparatus. Characteristic of such contamination, if power is removed for a sufficiently long period, contaminating elements are not only preserved, but will proliferate. For this reason, it is preferred to manufacture the upstream tubing (including the closed reservoir) of copper which is internally plated with silver and to braze the joints of the tubing with a silver alloy as well. It is well known that silver has an antimicrobial action and, as such, can retard contaminating growth.

As liquid containing dissolved gas (e.g. Chlorine) is released and combines as a reactive bubble against walls of an inoperative apparatus, oxidation may occur to further contaminate the effluent product. It has been found that such occurs in the output section of the apparatus. To resolve this issue, only plastic tubing is used rather than oxidation prone metals in this section of the apparatus.

Similar to invasion of biofilm at the input of the apparatus, the down steam connection sites of such an apparatus are prone to contamination, as well. For this reason, to protect the product output, two mechanisms can be provided. First, a sterilizing light may be employed within the chamber of a liquid collecting storage vessel. Second, similar to cleaning contaminants from the input, a pressure release valve is provided at the outlet permitting conversion of liquid to steam thereby effectively purge the apparatus output.

As only three measurable parameters totally define efficacy of apparatus operation (i.e. pathway temperature, pathway internal pressure and time of flow through the apparatus), sampled measurement of these parameters provides an accurate assessment of apparatus performance. Such sampling, when combined with digital storage and publication over a communications medium such as the Internet, provides a real time, remotely accessible record of apparatus performance.

Accordingly, it is a foremost object to provide apparatus and methods for clearing and cleaning biofilm build-up from liquid input and output sites of the apparatus, for controlling growth and proliferation of incompletely sterilized contaminating media within the system upon shut down and for providing a system which is unreactive to gaseous anions which may accumulate during shut down.

As well, It is yet a primary object to provide an efficacious aqueous liquid purification system which controllably sterilizes aqueous liquid to a predetermined SAL.

It is a fundamental object to provide an aqueous liquid purification system which controllably sterilizes an aqueous liquid to a predetermined SAL by controlling rate of flow of the aqueous liquid through said system.

It is an important object to provide a system which inherently maintains a substantially fixed predetermined pressure in a heating unit thereby assuring that aqueous liquid in the heating unit is maintained in a liquid state while being sterilized therein.

It is an object to provide a process by which a heating unit, through which aqueous liquid flows and in which the aqueous liquid is heated, is maintained at a substantially fixed temperature.

It is an object to provide a system which assures a predetermined pressure of effluent flowing from said system.

It is an object to provide an energy efficient system which transfers thermal energy from effluent liquid, after sterilization, to influent liquid before sterilization, thereby reducing effluent temperature to a predetermined lower temperature level before leaving the system and preheats influent aqueous liquid before it enters the heating unit.

It is a very important object to sterilize an aqueous solution to an SAL of 10^{-6} at an energy cost not greater than 200 watt-hours per gallon.

These and other objects and features of the present invention will be apparent from the detailed description taken with reference to accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is schematic of an aqueous liquid sterilization system which may be adjusted to control degree of purification (SAL).

FIG. 2 is a schematic of a test system model used to determine effectiveness of a sterilization process consistent with the instant invention.

FIG. 3 is a schematic of an aqueous liquid sterilization, similar to the system seen in FIG. 1, but with addition of parts to accommodate for input and output contamination, proliferating contamination due periodic system shut down and corrosive action of released dissolved gases during shut down.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE ILLUSTRATED EMBODIMENTS

In this description, the term proximal is used to indicate nearness of a referenced item to the object of the sentence describing its position. The term distal should be interpreted as indicating "away from" a referenced item. Numbers and primes of the same numbers are used to indicate items of related mechanics and function, but which may have physical differences.

Continuously Operating Model Disclosure

Reference is now made to the embodiment illustrated in FIG. 1. While only a single embodiment is provided herein, it should be apparent to one skilled in water and other aqueous liquid purification by sterilization that other embodiments may be employed within the scope of the invention.

As seen in FIG. 1, a water sterilization system 10 comprises an influent channel 20, where through water from a source 22 (see arrow 24) is delivered, a flow controller subsystem 30, a heat exchanger 40 through which influent liquid flows in an input pathway 50 and through which effluent liquid flows into an output pathway 60, a heating chamber 70 and a discharge pathway 80 (see arrow 82). Pathway 80 may often lead to a container (seen in FIG. 1 as container 84). Note that all flow in system 10 is unidirectional, keeping parts distal from heating chamber 70 (i.e. parts associated with discharge pathway 80) uncontaminated by flow reflux in a direction opposite arrow 82.

Flow controller subsystem 30 may comprise a pump 100 and a pump controller 102. Pump 100 should have a variable pumping capacity to supply a predetermined volume of liquid flow through the system against a back pressure which is the consequence of a temperature rise in heating chamber 70 and back-pressure of release valve 130. It should be noted that no pump may be required if hydrostatic pressure of the source 22 exceeds the back pressure of valve 130. However, in any case, it is necessary to control flow to assure liquid is retained in heating chamber 70 for a period sufficiently long to achieve a desired SAL. In cases where flow is not pump controlled and

upstream pressure is known, a flow restricting orifice (not shown) may be employed. In this instant invention because controlled flow rates are used to variably determine SALs of effluent, an adjustable orifice (also not shown) may be employed.

Heat exchanger technology is well known in water heating and cooling art. However, it is important that as much energy as possible be transferred from liquid in output or effluent pathway 60 to input or influent pathway 50 within heat exchanger 40 to minimize heat energy loss. For these reasons, pathway 50 should be proximal to and in good thermal communication with pathway 60.

It is critical that the system liquid pathway 118 (a combination of input pathway 50, an internal heating chamber pathway 120 and output pathway 60) be capable of withstanding an internal pressure generated by heating of liquid within the pathway to a desired temperature while maintaining a liquid state. As an example, liquid at 150° Centigrade has a vapor pressure of 55 pounds per square inch (psi). To assure liquid at 150° does not change state, internal pressure in pathway 118 must exceed 55 psi.

For this reason, a flow resisting element, such as a pop valve 130 is serially connected in a section of output pathway 60 distal from heating chamber 70 and heat exchanger 40. Pop valve 130 is selected to open at a first higher pressure level and close at a second lower pressure level. The difference between the higher pressure level and lower pressure level being a defined operating pressure differential wherein liquid in pathway 120 is sterilized over a predetermined period of time. As this pressure differential of a pop valve is considered to control pressure over a relatively small differential, the pressure, so controlled, is considered to be fixed.

To further assure that there is no flow through pathway 118 (and discharge pathway 80) until conditions for water sterilization have been reached in pathway 120, a second valve, numbered 140, is serially connected in discharge pathway 80. In FIG. 1, valve 140 is seen to be a solenoid valve activated by an AND combination of two switches, a pressure sensor switch 150 and a temperature sensor switch 160.

Interestingly, it may be noted that the pressure sensing by valve 130, as a back pressure regulator, performs substantially the same pressure controls as that resulting from activity of sensor 150. Thus, action of pressure sensor 150 is redundant and AND gate 162 with input 164 may be eliminated, and output of temperature sensor 160 used to directly control valve 140. Note, that in this case, the serial disposition of valves 130 and 140 provide a logical "AND" combination, eliminating the need for AND gate 162.

Sensor switch 160 activates to open at or below a first lower predetermined temperature level of liquid in pathway 120 and close at a second higher predetermined level in pathway 120. It should be noted that heating of chamber 70 is controlled by another sensor (184 as disclosed in detail hereafter).

Similarly, pressure sensor switch 150 activates to open at a third predetermined lower pressure level (which is substantially the same as the first pressure level disclosed supra) and closes at a fourth higher pressure level (which is substantially the same as the second higher pressure level disclosed supra).

As an example, pressure sensor switch 150 may be selected to close at 80 psi and open at 55 psi, while temperature sensor switch 160 may close at 150° centigrade and open at 140° centigrade. As such, switch 150 must sense 80 psi and switch 160 must sense 150° centigrade (symbolized by AND gate 162) to open valve 140 to permit effluent to flow through system 10 (with valve 130 also open). Note, pressure sensor

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switch **150** is connected to AND gate **162** via line **164** and temperature sensor switch **160** is connected to AND gate **162** via line **166**.

To sterilize water at least to a predictable SAL, both system **10** water flow rate and heating chamber **70** temperature must be known and well controlled to assure liquid in pathway **120** is resident in heating chamber **70** for a long enough period to assure the desired sterilization level. Water flow rate is closely controlled by pump **100** and pump controller **102** other flow control means. Temperature is preferably induced in liquid in pathway **120** by a high heat capacity bath **170** which has high heat transfer and precise temperature control characteristics.

While other media may be used in such a bath, such as oil or high heat capacity fluids, it is preferred to use a precisely specified non-linear heat-sink material such as paraffin, as matter **180** in heating chamber **70**. In this case, matter **180** is a stable substance which changes state from a solid to a liquid and maintains a constant desired predetermined temperature during the state change. Particularly suited for use in bath **170** is paraffin. Paraffin may be formulated to accurately and precisely melt at a selected temperature. Such paraffin is currently available from ASTOR Specialty Chemicals, 1600 Commerce, Marshall, Tex. 75670. As an example, matter **180** may be selected to have a melting point of 120° centigrade.

Heating of matter **180** is accomplished by a set of electrical heating elements, generally referenced by **182**, which are turned off and on by a bimetallic temperature switch **184**. Heating elements **182** are powered by a standard electrical plug assembly **186** which is interconnected to heating elements **182** via electrical lines **183**, **185** and **188**. Bimetallic temperature switch **184** is interposed between line **183** and line **185**. Dashed lines indicate electrical line residence in bath **170**.

Switch **184** is selected to open at a temperature which is above the melting point of matter **180** (e.g. 152° centigrade and to close at a temperature (i.e. 148° centigrade) and above the activation temperature of temperature sensing element **160**. So constrained, heating of matter **180** is the result of a hysteresis effect of the temperature sensor, making operation temperature stable. Further, it should be noted that, for sterilization purposes, such a 4° temperature differential permits the operating (sterilizing) temperature to be considered substantially constant.

System **10** may be constructed from a large number of parts generally available in commerce today. Examples of parts which may be used are as follows:

System 10 Part	Commercial Part
Pump 100	Flojet Pump model #03655E7011A, available from Flojet, ITT Industries, 201 CON, Fort Hill Ranch, CA.
Temp. Sensor Switch 184	Texas Instruments 20260 bimetal thermal switch, Normally Closed.
Temp. Sensor Switch 160	Texas Instruments 20260 bimetal thermal switch, Normally Open.
Pres. Sensor Switch 150	Texas Instruments 36PS-50 psi, Normally Open.
Heating Elements 182	TEMCO Finned Strip Heaters, Type 4, 500 Watt, available from TEMCO, 607 North Central, Wood Dale, IL 60191.
Valve 140	Solenoid Valve #4639K8 (120 volt, .13 Amps), available from McMaster-Carr Supply Co., www.mcmaster.com.
Press. Rel. Valve 130	CA Series In-line Adjustable Relief Valve having a cracking pressure range from 50 to 150 PSIG, available from NUPRO Company, 4800

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-continued

System 10 Part	Commercial Part
Pathway 118	East 345 th Street, Willoughby, OH 44094. Preferably constructed from high pressure, stainless steel tubing (with all joints welded to withstand temperatures above melting temperature of matter 180).

The time to sterilize an item, using saturated steam at a given temperature is well known and summarized in Table 1 below:

TABLE 1

Time to sterilize	Sterilization temperature
20 minutes	121° Centigrade
10 minutes	128° Centigrade
3.5 minutes	134° Centigrade
Nearly instantaneous	141° Centigrade

However, data in Table 1 is not directly related to SALs. Therefore, some nominal experimentation may be necessary to develop known sterilization criteria for each system **10**. Through experimentation it has been found that water sterilization by system **10** at different parametric levels of flow yields different SALs for assorted species tested. It should not be surprising that SALs vary for different microbes and other water-borne organisms.

Test Model Disclosure

FIG. 2 is a schematic representation of a test model **200** used to test effectiveness of sterilizing aqueous solutions by processes consistent with the instant invention. As seen in FIG. 2, model **200** comprises a source **22'** of influent contaminated water. In this case, source **22'** is a 60 gallon drum strategically disposed above a pump **100'** for easy priming.

Similar to system **10** seen in FIG. 1, model **200** comprises an influent channel **20**, wherethrough water from a source **22'** (see arrow **24**) is delivered, a pump **100'**, a heat exchanger **40'** through which influent liquid flows in an input pathway **50'** and through which effluent liquid flows in an output pathway **60'**, a heating chamber **70'** and a discharge pathway **80'** (see arrow **82**).

Pump **100'** is manually controllable. Pump **100'** has a variable pumping capacity which is manually adjusted to supply a predetermined volume of liquid flow through the system. A needle valve **140'** is used for manual control of flow through model **200**. Temperature of solution in pathway **120'** (which is the in heating bath portion of total system pathway **118'**) is monitored by means of a temperature sensor **210** (a thermocouple) and a graphic recorder **220**. Note that an electrical line **222** interconnects sensor **210** and recorder **220**. In this model, an Esterline Angus Video Graphic Model B recorder was used.

Energy supplied to heating elements **182** of heating chamber **70'** of model **200** was monitored by a voltmeter **230** and an ammeter **240**. Varying amounts of energy was supplied from electrical plug assembly **186** to heating elements **182** and therefrom to bath **170** of heating chamber **70'** via a variable voltage rheostat **250**. Note that electrical lines **183'**, **185**, **187'** and **188'** are used to supply electrical energy to heating elements **182**. Line **183'** interconnects assembly **186** and one side of temperature sensor switch **184**. The other side of temperature sensor switch **184** is connected to heaters **182** via electrical line **185**. Ammeter **240** is placed in series (via

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electrical line 187') from plug assembly 186 to rheostat 250. Rheostat 250 is connected to heating elements 182 via electrical line 188'.

Model 200 system liquid pathway 118' was designed to be capable of withstanding any internal pressure generated by heating of liquid within the pathway to temperatures within the scope of reasonable experimental safety limits while constraining liquids in pathway 118' to remain in a liquid state.

In model 200, liquid pathway 118' had a volume of 600 ml. Temperature was held between 143 and 144 degrees centigrade. Pump 100' supplied liquid at a constant pressure of 95 psi. Heat exchanger 40' employed coaxial piping. Pop valve 130 (a pressure release valve) was rated at 50 psi. As earlier disclosed, needle valve 140' was used to manually regulate flow rate through pathway 118'.

Temperature of pathway 118' was manually monitored by thermocouple 210 placed in thermal communication with pathway 118'. As earlier disclosed, an Estiline Angus model videographic system B (recorder 220) was used to continuously monitor temperature. Variations in temperature caused by increasing or decreasing rate of flow were adjusted by rheostat 250 which adjusted electric power supplied to a set of heating elements, generally referenced as 182. In model 200, four such 500 watt heating elements were employed.

Biologic testing was performed to determine effectiveness of sterilization at different flow rates using water contaminated with the following four different microorganisms:

1. *Bacillia sterothromophilus*
2. *E. colli*
3. *Candida Aldicans*
4. *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*

A predetermined quantity of each microorganism was mixed with 25 gallons of distilled water and dispensed into a drum to provide source 22'. A serial dilution of each batch of microorganisms was titrated and tested to establish the concentration of each organism in the batch. Every batch prepared was determined to contain at least 10^6 organisms.

Each of the four test organisms were run in duplicate on different days. A test protocol was prepared to run five different effective sterilization periods on each organism. Generally, flow rates employed were divided into a plurality of constant flow one and one-half hour periods. In the runs, flow rates used ranged from 50 to 350 milliliters per minute, in 50 milliliter per minute increments. However, due to lack of meaningful results at lower flow rates and limits on volumes of solution available in model 200, less than a complete complement of flow rates were often used, e.g. 250, 300 and 350 milliliters/minute were used in a test run performed on Apr. 25, 2003, results of which are provided hereafter.

Samples were taken at fifteen minute intervals throughout each test period (providing seven samples per period). Each sample was tested by placing a milliliter aliquot onto a blood agar or enriched agar plate, incubated for 48 hours and read by a qualified microbiologist. As seen by the examples of data provided hereafter, kill ratio of each sample generally exceeded a 10^{-6} organism reduction in processed effluent.

Though all tests showed similar sterilization results, a summary of two tests using *bacillia sterothromophilus* are provided, in Tables 3 and 5 below, as exemplary results of running model 200. Dates of performance of the exemplary tests were Apr. 19, 2003 and Apr. 25, 2003. For each test run, content of source 22' was titrated as a control. Two sets of such results, one set for each solution tested on Apr. 19, 2003 and Apr. 25, 2003, are provided separately in Tables 2 and 4, respectively.

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TABLE 2

Titration of Stock Culture Used Apr. 19, 2003 Sample volume is 1.0 ml/each dilution (unless otherwise noted). Plates incubated@59° C. for 18 hours		
Event	Dilution	Colonies
1	10^{-1}	TNTC**
2	10^{-2}	TNTC**
3	10^{-3}	TNTC**
4	10^{-4}	TNTC**
5	10^{-5}	no record
6	10^{-6}	no record
7	10^{-7}	~600
8	10^{-8}	***
9	10^{-9}	***
10	10^{-10}	***
11	10^{-0} (Stock)	TNTC**

*0.250 ml sample volume

**Too Numerous To Count

*** Titration not performed due to measurable level at event 7

TABLE 3

Test Run Apr. 19, 2003 (Temperature of pathway 118': 143 to 144° C.)			
Run #	Flow Rate (ml/min)	Time in minutes (within run)	Colonies
I	100	0	2**
		15	0
		30	0
		45	0
		60	0
		75	0
II	150	90	0
		0	0
		15	0
		30	0
		45	0
		60	0
III	200	75	0
		90	0
		0	0
		15	0
		30	0
		45	0
IV	300	60	0
		75	0
		90	0
		0	0
		15	0
		30*	450
		45*	150

See note (reference []) following Table 5.

**Initial contamination in effluent pathway.

TABLE

Titration of Stock Culture Used Apr. 25, 2003 Sample volume is 1.0 ml/each dilution (unless otherwise noted). Plates incubated@59° C. for 18 hours		
Event	Dilution	Colonies
1	10^{-1}	TNTC**
2	10^{-2}	TNTC**
3	10^{-3}	1000
4	10^{-4}	400
5	10^{-5}	250
6	10^{-6}	180
7	10^{-7}	120
8	10^{-8}	75
9	10^{-9}	64

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TABLE-continued

Titration of Stock Culture Used Apr. 25, 2003 Sample volume is 1.0 ml/each dilution (unless otherwise noted). Plates incubated @ 59° C. for 18 hours		
Event	Dilution	Colonies
10	10 ⁻¹⁰	25
11	10 ^{-0*} (Stock)	TNTC**

*0.250 ml sample volume

**Too Numerous To Count

TABLE 5

Test Run Apr. 25, 2003 (Temp. of pathway 118': 143 to 144° C.)			
Run #	Flow Rate (ml/min)	Time in minutes (within run)	Colonies
II	300	75	0
		90	0
		0	0
		15	0
		30	0
		45	0
I	250	60	0
		75	0
		0	0
		15	0
		30	0
		45	0
III	350	60	0
		90	0
		0	0
		15	0
		30	0
		45	0
		60	0
		75*	1000

*Tank take-off connection at a point 2.5 gallons from tank bottom. Test samples were taken until flow became erratic due to tank drainage. This variation in liquid flow caused heating chamber temperature to first increase rapidly, turning off bimetal over temperature protectors (not otherwise disclosed) resulting in a dramatic decrease in operating temperature. Data at run #III, time 75 minutes (and at run#II, times 30 and 45 minutes) provided to permit a comparative assessment with data derived from system 200 under normal operating conditions.

Results from all tests proved the efficacy of the instant invention. Independent of microorganisms tested and flow rates tested, system model 200 clearly sterilized contaminated influent to produce a continuously flowing sterilized effluent. The effectiveness of sterilization was demonstrated when compared with final samples of contaminated and unsterilized effluent which resulted when temperature of model 200 precipitously declined as an end-of-run phenomenon when water from source 22' was depleted.

Intermittently Operated System Disclosure

Reference is now made to FIG. 3 wherein complimentary changes are provided to the apparatus seen in FIG. 1 to provide for improved operating characteristics as disclosed in detail hereafter. The embodiment seen in FIG. 3 is similar to the embodiment seen in FIG. 1, but it should be apparent to one skilled in water and other aqueous liquid purification by sterilization that other embodiments may be employed as disclosed supra.

Changes found within apparatus 10' (FIG. 3) relative to apparatus 10 are generally incorporated because, while the pathway within apparatus 10' is also unbifurcated, entry and exit pathways provide sources for invasion of contaminating matter. Such matter commonly can invade as a result of intermittently ceasing of flow through apparatus 10' (or 10), especially when flow stoppage is associated with loss of power. Loss of power or shut down may occur due to an effluent

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reservoir being filled with an accompanying power down to save energy, power loss or maintenance. When a stoppage occurs, other chemical activity, which is inorganic in nature, may also occur, such as, oxidation of pathway metals by gaseous elements which are released upon stagnation and cooling.

Similar to system 10 seen in FIG. 1, water sterilization system 10' comprises influent channel 20 (where through water from a source 22 (see arrow 24) is delivered), a flow controller subsystem 30', a heat exchanger 40 through which influent liquid flows in an input pathway 50 and through which effluent liquid flows in an output pathway 60, a heating chamber 70 and a discharge pathway 80" (which is interrupted by pop valve 310 and valve 140, each of which are functionally equivalent to valves 130 and 140, respectively, seen in FIG. 1).

As seen in FIG. 3, pathway 80" may often lead to a container (seen in FIG. 3 as container 300). Note that all flow associated during normal water sterilization in system 10' is unidirectional, keeping parts distal from heating chamber 70 (i.e. parts associated with discharge pathway 80") uncontaminated by flow reflux in a direction opposite arrow 302. For cleaning purposes, however, as disclosed in detail hereafter, retrograde flow may be generated by upstream pressure reduction for purposes of cleaning invading contamination from influent channel 20 and influent source 22.

Flow controller subsystem 30 may comprise a pump 100 and a pump controller 102'. Pump 100 should have characteristics similar to those disclosed for pump 100, as seen in FIG. 1. All normal operating fluid flow control is the same as that disclosed for control orifices and for pump 100, seen in FIG. 1.

Heat exchanger technology as applied to system 10, seen in FIG. 1, is the same as applied to system 10' seen in FIG. 3; however, materials used in pathways 50 and 60 are different and selectively defined for purposes disclosed hereafter.

It is critical that the system liquid pathways 118" (including a combination of input pathway 50, an internal heating chamber pathway 120 and output pathway 60) be capable of withstanding an internal pressure generated by heating of liquid within the pathway to a desired temperature while maintaining a liquid state as disclosed for system 10.

For this reason, a flow resisting element, such as a pop valve 310, is serially connected in a section of output pathway 60 distal from heating chamber 70 and heat exchanger 40. In normal operation, pop valve 310 operates in like manner as disclosed for valve 130 (see FIG. 1), supra.

Second valve, numbered 140, temperature sensor switch 160, pressure sensor switch 150 and sensor 180 each operate the same in system 10 and 10'. For detailed disclosure related to these devices and for conditions for water sterilization, please refer to disclosure related to FIG. 1. Also control of heating of matter 180 is the same for system 10' as for system 10. Thus, with the exception of items differentially disclosed hereafter, System 10' may be constructed from the same product parts listed for system 10.

It should be noted that system 10 is taught to operate effectively in a continuous, dynamic mode. However, real world operation requires consideration of other factors such as:

1. Growth and proliferation of contaminating media which are only partially eradicated (not reduced to a desired SAL) upon system shut down due to a filled down stream reservoir or upon power failure
2. Biofilm build-up at a liquid input site
3. Potential retrograde contamination through the down stream reservoir

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4. Oxidative contamination resulting from released gaseous anions which may occur during a shut down period To provide solutions for these factors, the following is incorporated into System 10' (see FIG. 3).

Growth and Proliferation

To reduce growth and proliferation of contaminating media disposed in pathway 118", copper tubing is employed. Further, all internal surfaces and joints of the copper tubing are either silver plated or braised with a silver alloy. It is well known in the sterilization art that silver ions are highly antimicrobial. Thus, when a stagnant condition occurs within pathway 118", availability of a silver interface with the standing water acts to impede growth of only partially sterilized elements.

Biofilm Build-Up

Continuous influx of contaminated influent from source 22 into channel 20 is not conducive to trouble free operation. For this reason a defeatable (i.e. manually openable) one-way valve 310 is disposed in channel 20 upstream from pump 100. To purge and clean a biofilm build-up, during normal operation, one-way valve 310 is defeated to an open state, which reduces pressure in pathway 118", permitting retrograde flow of steam (which is released upon pressure drop when valve 310 is defeated (opened for retrograde flow opposite direction of arrow 24) to purge back toward source 22. Such a valve may be a Swagelok R Series pressure release valve, which, in addition to being a one-way valve, has a manual control by which the valve is opened for backflow. This pressure release valve is in-line adjustable and has a cracking pressure range from 50 to 150 PSIG, similar to valve 130 disclosed in FIG. 1.

Retrograde Contamination

Retrograde contamination (derived from backflow against direction of arrow 302) is first blocked by a state change barrier and second is cleared by a flow release of steam from upstream pathways. Note that vessel 300, which may be a carboy with an inferiorly disposed output port 322 and a superiorly disposed input port 324 is disposed to provide and effluent reservoir 326. A pair of liquid level detecting sensors 330 and 332 (power connections not shown) are disposed and designed to emit a signal along lines 334, 336 and 338. When surface level 340 of reservoir 326 is detected by sensor 330, the resulting signal along line 336 is sent to flow controller subsystem 30' to turn pump 100 off. Similarly, the resulting signal is delivered to a solenoid subsystem 350 which acts to disconnect power from heating elements 182. Thus the generated signal completely shuts down system 10'. Because the internal surface of pathway 118' is silver coated, uncontrolled growth of unsterilized media is inhibited. Further, an air interface 360 between surface 340 and port 324 provides an effective barrier to undesired upstream migration.

To further alleviate undesired proliferation of growing species in reservoir 326, an ultraviolet light source 370 is disposed in reservoir vessel. Also, to evacuate unwanted gas from container 300, a filter 372 is fitted to a sealing cap 374, which provides a top seal for vessel 300. Cap 374 provides an effective contaminant barrier for container 300.

In addition, a valve 310, as disclosed supra, is used in place of valve 130 (see FIG. 1), permitting the valve to be defeated resulting in a pressure reduction upstream in the single unbifurcated pathway 118", resulting in subsequent steam creation and cleaning and purging of downstream pathways.

Oxidative Contamination

It has been found that at the distal pathway end (i.e. pathway 80") gaseous emissions can oxidize metals which might otherwise be used in pathway construction. For this reason, a pipe made of synthetic resinous material is incorporated, extending from a connecting sleeve 380, which interconnects

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copper pipe of pathway 118" to pathway 80". For this purpose, nylon piping may be used although is preferred to use piping made from fluoropolymer high temperature material, which is unreactive with such emissions (e.g. chlorine from chlorinated water).

Remote Monitoring

As flow rate, temperature and pressure are the only variables necessary to provide an accurate characterization of system operation and viability, a group of analog to digital sampling registers (i.e. registers 390, 392 and 394 are connected to output of controller 30' and sensors 150 and 160, respectively) and from there may be communicated to a computer for further transmission through network media (e.g. the Internet) for international monitoring. Such sampling registers are well known in the digital computer art.

The invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from the spirit or essential characteristics thereof. The present embodiment is therefore to be considered in all respects as illustrative and not restrictive, the scope of the invention being indicated by the appended claims rather than by the foregoing description, and all changes which come within the meaning and range of equivalency of the claims are therefore intended to be embraced therein.

What is claimed and desired to be secured by Letters Patent is:

1. An apparatus for sterilizing water fulfilling a requirement of receiving water containing living organisms through an input pathway and responding to being repowered by automatically processing all water disposed within the apparatus and water afterward flowing through said apparatus to deliver a water product free of living organisms through an effluent pathway via a self-regulating, flow inhibiting, flow-through system which maintains water in a liquid state when raised to a predetermined sterilizing temperature for a predetermined period of time and only delivers the water when conditions for sterilization are met, thereby maintaining the effluent pathway free of living organisms, said apparatus comprising:

- a pressurized source;
- the input pathway through which water flows from said pressurized source;
- the effluent pathway from which water is dispensed from said apparatus;
- a single, unbifurcated pathway comprising said input pathway and said effluent pathway;
- a heating chamber for heating the water to the predetermined sterilizing temperature;
- a heat source associated with the heating chamber;
- said unbifurcated pathway further comprising sidewalls capable of withstanding increased internal pressure of the water at the sterilizing temperature and thereby maintaining the water in a liquid state; and

control apparatus comprising:

- a flow controller which controls flow rate of water flowing through said unbifurcated pathway to assure that time for water flowing within the unbifurcated pathway is consistent with a time water is to be held at the predetermined sterilizing temperature to free the water of living organisms;
- a binary temperature sensor preset to emit a condition met signal only when the temperature of the water is greater than the predetermined sterilizing temperature;
- a binary pressure sensor preset to emit a condition met signal only when the pressure within the unbifurcated pathway is at least pressure of water heated to the predetermined sterilizing temperature;

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a pathway controller, which is self-operating, comprising a plurality of valving mechanisms which are disposed to provide all on/off control necessary for gating flow through the pathway, said pathway controller comprising:

a first of said valving mechanisms being serially disposed within the unbifurcated pathway, selectively maintaining closure of the unbifurcated pathway unless conditions for sterilizing water are met and opening the unbifurcated pathway only upon satisfaction of an AND combination of condition met signals from temperature and pressure sensors to thereby provide open, effluent flow through the unbifurcated pathway only when the temperature and pressure conditions are met, thereby maintaining the unbifurcated pathway downstream from the heating chamber free of living organisms through all stages of operation of said apparatus including start-up and shut-down;

a second of said valving mechanisms comprising a back-flow regulator which maintains a pressure, which keeps water in a liquid state independent of water flow rate, said regulator being serially connected within said unbifurcated pathway downstream from said heating chamber, said second valving mechanism selectively opening at a pressure greater than the pressure required for the condition met signal of the binary pressure sensor to assure flow is inhibited until the pressure required for the condition met signal for sterilizing the water is met.

2. Apparatus for sterilizing water according to claim 1 wherein said single, unbifurcated pathway further comprises a continuous upstream segment comprising copper pipe which further comprises an internal surface which exposes only silver.

3. Apparatus for sterilizing water according to claim 1 further comprising a vessel which serves as a receiving containment reservoir for delivered effluent.

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4. Apparatus for sterilizing water according to claim 3 wherein said apparatus further comprises sensing and switching controls whereby liquid volume resident within said vessel is limited.

5. Apparatus for sterilizing water according to claim 4 wherein said switching and sensing controls stop flow from said pressurized source is curtailed when the reservoir is full.

6. Apparatus for sterilizing water according to claim 3 wherein said vessel comprises flow input and reservoir containing geometry which provides an air interface which impedes retrograde contamination.

7. Apparatus for sterilizing water according to claim 1, said apparatus comprising a heat exchanger wherein heat of effluent sterilized water is transferred into influent water to be sterilized.

8. Apparatus for sterilizing water according to claim 7, further comprising a defeatable one-way valve disposed upstream from said heat exchanger which when defeated to permit upstream flow, results in reduction of pressure within the single, unbifurcated pathway and steam production which, when discharged toward the pressurized source cleans the unbifurcated pathway.

9. Apparatus for sterilizing water according to claim 7, further comprising a defeatable one-way valve disposed downstream from said heat exchanger which when defeated to reduce pressure within the single, bifurcated pathway, results in reduction of pressure within the single, unbifurcated pathway and steam production which, when discharged through the defeated valve cleans the effluent pathway.

10. Apparatus for sterilizing water according to claim 1 wherein said single, unbifurcated pathway further comprises a continuous downstream segment which comprises a synthetic resinous material.

11. Apparatus for sterilizing water according to claim 10 wherein said continuous downstream segment synthetic resinous material is a fluoropolymer high temperature material.

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